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ABSTRACT

This study was an attempt to assess the general state of delivery of student development services to students 35 years old and older in Florida's community colleges. Its purpose was to locate areas of needed improvement, to identify innovative programs, and to provide an opportunity for thinking about this increasingly important area of community service. A questionnaire was sent to 40 chief student development officers during May 1977. The most significant result of this study was the percent (84%) of questionnaires returned, indicating that the student development officers in Florida are highly interested in serving older students. The 12 areas covered included admissions, course accessibility, finance, counseling, and food service. Current special efforts being made by student development staffs were also covered. It was concluded that the elements of an ideal student development program for older students are present in the Florida Community College System, though not all at one college. It was found, by rank order correlation coefficient, that the larger colleges were more likely than smaller ones to offer services for this population. In addition, the study indicated many areas of possible improvement. (Author)

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REPORT OF RESULTS OF A QUESTIONNAIRE ON STUDENT DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
FOR OLDER STUDENTS IN FLORIDA'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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EDUCATION & WELFARE
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PURPOSE

This study was an attempt to assess the general state of delivery of student development services to students 35 years old and older in Florida's community college system. Because of the state's rather unique opportunity to serve a rapidly growing adult population, especially older adults, an assessment was necessary in order to locate areas of needed improvement, to identify innovative programs, and to provide an opportunity to think about this increasingly important area of community service.

METHODOLOGY

Forty student development officers at 28 community colleges who were designated as "Chief" were identified in the Florida Education Directory. The questionnaire which was sent to these individuals was developed theoretically by postulating an ideal program for older students. The instrument was field tested at Santa Fe Community College by administering it to the Director of Special Programs, who previously had held the position of Vice President for Student Development, and the Director of Counseling and Academic Planning. The questionnaire was mailed on May 1, 1977, with a requested return date of May 15, 1977. A second mailing was sent to those who had not returned their questionnaires by May 22, 1977. Though copies were sent to each campus of multi-campus colleges, the data was summarized by college for statistical consideration. In some cases returns were received from only one or two campuses at larger colleges and generalized to the college at large.

RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

One of the most significant results of this study is the number of questionnaires which were returned. This unusually high percent (34%) indicates that the student development officers around the state have a keen appreciation of the problems involved in serving older students and have a high degree of interest in implementing this community service. Only three colleges were omitted because no returns were received: Daytona Beach Community College, Manatee Junior College, and North Florida Junior College.

Admissions and Registration--About half the time the admissions and registration procedures approximated the theoretical model. Specifically admissions and registration were handled in such a manner as to attempt to make the process more accessible to older students. However, in only a few cases was the student's life experience evaluated for college credit in any manner other than CLEP.

Accessibility of Courses--Though the location of courses is not generally viewed as a student development function, in order for a viable program of adult services to be offered, courses must be distributed around the community, specifically at public schools and retirement centers with low cost or free transportation to the course locations. About half responded that courses were distributed throughout the community and that transportation was available.

Student Finance--Two questions were asked in this area: was financial aid administered equitably by age and were fee waivers given to a particular age group. In most cases the first question was answered positively and the second negatively, though variation was evident. The ages that were given as qualifiers for fee waivers were 60, 62, and 65.

Counseling--It was indicated that available counseling services were used frequently by older students but that no peer counselors of any age were trained to work with them and that little publicity of counseling services for older students was done.

Food Service--On most campuses prepared meals are available during the morning and early afternoon hours. Evening meals are seldom available. This question was asked because older students, particularly those over 55 years old, would more likely make use of campus facilities if low cost food was available.

Orientation--In most cases there is no orientation specially designed for older students. However, approximately one quarter of the respondents indicated that older students were taken into account in designing orientation.

Activities--Though entertainment and recreation was indicated to be available by two thirds of the respondents, intramural programs for older students were seldom available

Community Agency Interface--Nearly half of the respondents indicated that cooperative ventures with the following agencies are extant: Health and Rehabilitative Services, Community Mental Health, Older Americans Council, and Retiree Senior Volunteer Program. These agencies were selected because of the services that they provide citizens over 35 years old. An increase of this sort of cooperative effort is expected as a result of federal categorical funding priorities.

Student Survey--Six colleges in the state reported that they regularly surveyed the older students to determine needs which might be met by student development staffs. Because a needs assessment is a necessary first step in determining

the nature of services which are needed and a necessary last step in evaluating the effectiveness of the services being offered, this statistic indicates that systematic program planning would be helpful.

Designated Staff Member--Three campuses of 35 responding indicated that they have a person on the student development staff with the responsibility of overseeing and initiating services for older students. If a person is given this responsibility, services for older students will be given the necessary attention and coordination which is lacking currently.

Off Campus Services--In order to determine the extent to which outreach for older members of the population is carried out, the respondents were asked whether off campus services were offered. Eighteen colleges indicated that such services were not available. While there are many financial and temporal limitations, the limited positive response indicates a minimal level of commitment to services for older students.

Teaching--Nontraditional courses for older students are often centered on life problems or needs. The student development staff has unique training and experience to teach these courses. To the question if any student development staff taught courses aimed at the older students, eleven colleges indicated positively.

Current Special Efforts--An attempt was made to identify a number of activities which are currently being (offered) by student development staffs to increase enrollments of students over 35 years old. The following is a summary of these results.

1. Recruitment in churches, businesses, retirement centers, housing areas, AARP, women's clubs, shopping areas, and trailer parks.

2. Special women's programs.
3. Publicity in newspapers, church bulletins, and electronic media.
4. Mature students' programs.
5. Special interest credit and adult education courses.
6. Peer counseling and advisement.

Future Plans--The following is a summary of what was indicated as plans for future activity which would encourage older students to take advantage of community college experiences.

1. Evening hours.
2. Mobile center.
3. Special orientation and advisement.
4. Meaningful curriculum development.
5. Special workshops.
6. Mid-life career change or job skills enrichment.
7. Courses for adults planning to make changes in their lives.
8. Newsletter.

Population--The only aspect of this study which we felt was unsuccessful was the collection of population information. Specifically asked for was the number of students over 35 years old enrolled in credit and noncredit courses, the number of males and females in each category, and the number seeking degrees or certificates. Very few of the returns had this data. One conclusion is that this kind of information is best obtained in other ways. However, this sort of information could prove to be very valuable to student development staff in planning programs and services for this population.

SUMMARY

From this study is concluded that the elements of an ideal student

development program for older students are present in the Florida Community College System but not at any one college or campus. As could be expected it was found (by rank order correlation) that the larger the college the more likely it was for services to be offered. In addition, this study indicated many areas of possible improvement in making it possible for more of Florida's older citizens to participate in community college programs.